

Camas Trading Tradition Began With Indians Who Were Middlemen In Columbia River Trade

(Article from the Post-Record Special Edition, May 14, 1953)

Products from Camas travel the world over, and rightly so, for the residents of this area have a trading tradition reaching back for hundreds of years.

The "Original Camasians," the Indian tribes that lived in this area, were known as traders and plied the waters of the Columbia in their cedar dugout canoes as middlemen in a thriving ancient world of commerce. In their ocean going canoes they ranged as far north as Alaska and as far south as California to carry on a far-flung Marine commerce.

Even the language from which they took their name Chinookan, was part of their business as traders. It was an "animal of many breeds," since it took words from many languages and was universally understood by Northwest tribes.

Close to Mayans

The forebears of these Chinookans are an interesting lot, and scientists suspect that they may well have played an important part in the heritage of the civilization of two continents. A study made by Dr. Herbert W. Krieger, curator of ethnology of the United States National Museum, indicates strong connections between the very early Columbia river civilization and the culture of the Mayans in Guatemala.

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Many Small Nations

The inhabitants of this region were organized into many small nations when the white man discovered them late in the 1700's. While under reigning wing of one Chinookan chief and his counselors, they lived in small tribes, much like the counties we now have. Each group had its own language, but all also spoke the Chinookan trade language.

These early people once probably numbered 80,000, but the white man's disease reached and all but wiped out the race even before he appeared. Plagues of smallpox, fever and measles, coming via Spanish settlements in California and from captives from tribes having contact with the whites cut them to a much smaller number.

Early Pullmans

The Chinookans lived in well-roofed cedar shake homes, often sixty feet wide and several hundred feet in length. Each family had its space within the house, separated from their neighbors by a headboard. It is rumored

and lived much as the early inhabitants of the Columbia valley did. They flattened the heads of their children as the Columbiens did for centuries before them. They practiced slavery and human sacrifice, cremation and carving in stone in the same pattern as the early Columbiens.

Pullman got his idea for the modern sleeping car from these Indian apartment houses. They won their food from the river, the ocean and the valley in which they lived. Smoked salmon, venison, sturgeon and bear were in the larder for winter months. They whaled in the Pacific and ranged the Douglas fir rain forests for supplies.

For clothing the mere, fur from the bear, seal, elk and Coyote they killed, and to add an Easter Parade touch wore beehive shape toques. Squaws wore dresses from cedar bark, fiber and long grasses, often described as not unlike Hawaiian hula skirts.

Kamass Grew Here

The present day Camas-Washougal area was important to the Indians for two reasons. The Kamass Lily, one of their main food sources, grew in abundance here, and the present city of Camas owes its name to this city blue plant. The area was also a burial ground for tribes of this locality.

The Chinookans had a strong belief in the hereafter and equipped their dead well for a fine life in a mythical happy hunting ground. Dressed in their best clothing, the dead Indians were placed in canoes for the long journey. Hunting

gear and everything needed for a trip were put into the vessel. Canoes were punctured and utensils broken so their spirits could escape to accompany their master. It also made the object useless to thieves.

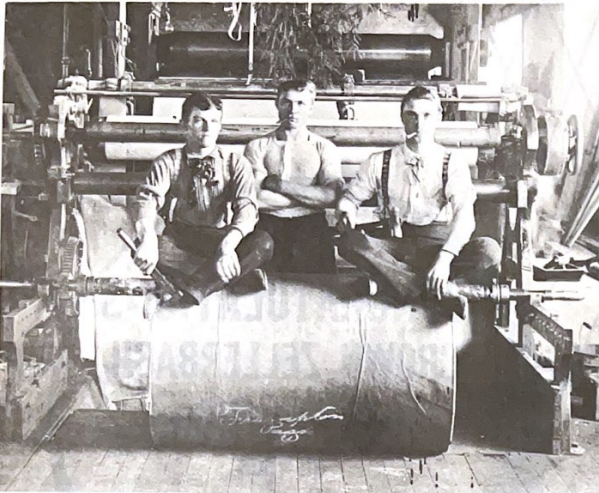
Tree Burial

The canoes were then raised into low limbs of trees, or were placed on stilts. Below the canoes at least two slaves were buried, human sacrifices who were blinded before death. They were to serve their masters in the life to come. They were blinded so as mere slaves they could not look on the beauties of the land of the happy hunting ground.

Dead Island, located in the Washougal river below the highway bridge, and above the railroad, was one of the Indians "death islands." Ten months after death the bodies were removed from the trees and buried on the mainland. Locally the area now known as Evergreen Terrace was a burial ground.

It was a tribe of highly civilized traders that greeted the white man when he appeared in the Columbia. A people who were rightly proud of their way of life who gave a hospitable greeting to the race that was to take their land and their river and send their products ranging even wider in the world.

You do not have to be superstitious to believe in safety signs.



Christmas spirit was entered into during early papermaking era with the help of a little yuletide decoration. Showing

off a roll of Camas paper are Joe Quillian, Mabs Smith and Alex Brand.



Fellow on top of machine (center) at Crown Zellerbach in early 1900's saw no need to put his shoes on for picture. Standing on floor, left to right are Smiley Williams, Dan

Provo, (next two unidentified), Joe Dupuis, Leon Dupuis and P. J. Lamoreaux—Picture loaned by CZ Corp.

Camas Site 'Natural' For Paper Mill Because Of Water Power From Lackamas

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Camas and its paper mill moved into their 70th year just two days ago on May 12. It was on that date in 1883 that representatives of the LaCamas Colony Co. inspected the area and decided this was a natural site to build a paper mill. Power would come by natural gravity flow of water from LaCamas lake.

Although the articles of incorporation for the Columbia River Paper company were not filed until March of the following year, negotiations were started at once to purchase land to gain control of the water power offered by the lake. Some 2,600 acres were bought by July 1, and almost at once crews of men were put to work building dams to control the all important water. The first expense of two dams built at the south end of the lake cost about \$16,000 according to B. F. Alley and J. P. Monro-Fraser in their History of Clarke County, published in 1885.

The historians estimated that two years after the paper mill construction started, the investors, H. L. Pitcock, W. Lewthwaite and J. K. Gill, had

spent \$100,000 for land and improvements.

Crews under D. H. Stearns started at once to clear timber from the land chosen as a millsite and in July of 1883 construction was started on a sawmill to furnish lumber for the proposed paper mill. According to articles published in the Vancouver Independent, a weekly paper of the day, machinery for the sawmill was landed by the steamer Callopie on August 20, 1883.

It was on September 10 that the original Camas townsite was laid out. Only two weeks before that the first dam on LaCamas lake had been finished, and the Independent reported 50 men were at work constructing the mill.

Camas was a flourishing community by this time, as businessmen had recognized it as a coming city. A. E. MacMaster, an old country Scotchman, opened the first store in the city. He sold his first piece of goods shortly after arriving with his stock on the steamer on Sept. 10, 1883, the same day the townsite was selected. His Pioneer store was all that the name implied and for years was a landmark in the city.

The lumber mill was designed to turn-out some 30,000 feet of timber each working day, and it was hard put to keep up with construction in the booming town. On December 1, 1884 the first addition to the Camas townsite, Cowan's addition, was made. Located

on the first bench, above the town proper, this addition contained seven homes when platted.

At the same time the Independent recorded more progress in industry. O. C. Grove was busy building a flouring mill, 30 x 40 feet and four stories high. It wasn't till November 19 of the next year that the LaCamas flouring mill delivered its first output to C. H. Hodges, however.

1929 Expansion

The mill, as we know it today, really came into being in a high expansion program in the years of 1929-30. Despite depression gloom throughout the nation, Crown Zellerbach directors authorized the investment of millions in expansion at Camas. The present converting plant was constructed on what had been a picnic area, and the overall plant capacity was jumped from 240 tons per day to 400 tons per day.

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World War II

World War II came and went. Mill workers played important roles through the vital war years. Many left their machines and homes to fight with the armed forces all over the globe. Others stayed in Camas to churn out paper to serve the needs of a nation at war. The Camas mill not only operated at top speed to put out paper, but its machine shop was pressed into use to build giant 17-ton ship rudders at a rate of four per week. All profit on the war machine shop work manufactured was turned back to the government by mill owners.

The Camas mill didn't lag a bit in the Thirties. Manufacture of all newspaper was stopped

here in 1930, and a mill that was founded to make paper for the Oregonian's presses in 1883 swung into its new role as the "largest specialty mill in the world."

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This is what the Bag Factory interior looked like during the 1920's, where it was possible to manufacture over 8 million



This picture of Camas paper mill shows stone portion, at right, which was part of original mill. Paper machines No. 7 and 8 now stand at that location, one source said.